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MEXICAN FOLK DANCES

By

GRACE THOMPSON PUGH

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WORKSHOP IN

INTER-AMERICAN EDUCATION

SUMMER SESSION, 1944

SOUTHWEST TEXAS

STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE

SAN MARCOS, TEXAS

IN COOPERATION WITH

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF MEXICAN FOLK DANCES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose in writing this paper is to find, portray and explain the significance of the native dances of old Mexico.

This topic was chosen because of the profound interest in, and deep affection of the writer for, our neighbor to the south. America should read with pride the history of those early Americans who, as far back as the time of Christ, studied the stars and produced architecture rarely surpassed in its sophistication and beauty. One approach to the study of that history may be made through the study of native dances. These dances reflect the whole history of folk life in Mexico.

The writer, having spent much time and study in Mexico, realizes this and hopes to convey at least part of the enchantment it holds for her. It is hoped that the reader from the study of these dances will gain not only a keener insight into the history of the country itself but a sympathetic understanding of its people as well.

Mexico itself has furnished the writer the greatest single source of materials for this study. This was brought about by a knowledge of the language, a warm personal friendship with many of its people, and extensive travel. Many of the dances have been witnessed personally in their native environment.

Mexico is popular today and many books have been and are being written on this subject. The writer has searched diligently through numberless books for the authenticity of each dance used in this paper. Although many books have been used, only those having direct bearing on this subject will be included in the bibliography.

The sources of data are as follows:

1. Eliot Library at Southwest Texas State Teachers College, San Marcos, Texas.
2. Library of St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas.
3. Library of the University of Mexico, Mexico, D.F.
4. Public Library, San Antonio, Texas.

5. Various periodicals and pamphlets.
6. Travel in Mexico.
7. Interviews with outstanding Mexican composers, musicians, and producers.

The writer does not presume to describe all the dances of Mexico. She has merely tried to collect and interpret some of the most famous and colorful of the folk dances. In setting this limitation it is necessary to understand the meaning of the term "folk". Redfield[1] defines the folk as a group which has folk lore and folk songs found in primitive tribes or simpler peasant peoples. Such peoples enjoy a common stock of tradition; they are the carriers of a culture. This culture preserves its continuity from generation to generation without depending upon the printed page. Another characteristic of the folk is that they are rural peoples. Folk lore is seldom encountered in cities. The terms "folk lore", "folk songs", and even "folk ways" have a meaning in considering Mexico which they lack in connection with a country such as ours. In spite of the many changes brought about by contact with Western civilization, the bulk of the Mexican population consists of folk. The ways of the folk constitute the real Mexico.[2]

Since each dance has a theme and tells a story, it has been necessary to adopt some guiding principles of selection. Outstanding dances were chosen from the standpoint of their geographical setting. Four divisions have been made:

1. Dances native to the State of Mexico and its neighbors—Guanajuato, Morelos, and Hidalgo.
2. Dances native to the western states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Sonora.
3. Dances native to the eastern states of Veracruz and Tamaulipas.
4. Dances native to the southern states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, and to the Peninsula of Yucatán.

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[1] Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlán, a Mexican Village,* pp. 1–4.

[2] *Mexican Music,* by William Tuckman, contains the music of many of the dances described in this booklet. (See Bibliography, p. 36.)

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MEXICAN FOLK DANCES

In no other American country is the present so rooted in the past as in Mexico. To understand what one sees one must know something of its background. To understand folk dances one must know something of the stories behind them. In discussing these dances it is fitting that we first consider the people who originated them and entrusted them to posterity along with other revealing customs.

Who were these people? From where did they come and how did they reach Mexico? Some say they came across the islands of the Bering Sea from Asia; others say they came from Europe by way of Greenland; still others contend that they came from Polynesia, crossing the Pacific in canoes. No one knows for certain—but we do know that these people inhabited the valleys and plateaus of Mexico and there lived their nomadic life for thousands of years.[1] Toor[2] divides their civilization into three periods—Archaic, Toltec, and Aztec.

The first Mexican civilization, which has been termed the Archaic, is the oldest civilization discovered on the American continent. Archeological explorations have disclosed skeletons and artifacts which indicate an advanced knowledge of agriculture, and worship of sun, rain, and wind gods. There is a difference of opinion as to the range of the Archaic Period but the majority favors three thousand years.

The Archaic Period was succeeded on the lowlands by the Mayan Period and on the highlands by the Toltec Period. The Mayans had developed a great civilization in Central America and in the peninsula of Yucatán. They built cities of rare architectural beauty. The Mayas were conquered by the Toltecs who absorbed much of the Mayan culture and spread it over the large territory they controlled. The Toltecs lived in Mexico from the 7th to the end of the 11th century, and to them is attributed the highest form of Pre-conquest civilization.[3] They were a mild, intelligent people and they lived a peaceful life. They built the

[1] Stuart Chase, *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas,* p. 24.
[2] Frances Toor, *Guide to Mexico,* p. 228.
[3] Toor, *loc. cit.*

amazing pyramids of San Juan Teotihuacán as well as the marvelous temple to their White god, Quetzalcoátl.

The Toltec empire gradually fell to pieces and was in turn conquered by the Aztecs, a cruel, stern, military people. Their civilization affords one of the best examples of the development of indigenous culture. In 1325 they founded the city of Tenochtitlán, or Mexico City. During the next two hundred years they improved their city and built up a nation that extended from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. They made beautiful things of silver and gold, and decorated them with turquoise. They invented a remarkable calendar; they understood medicine and sanitation; they made laws and collected taxes. Like the Toltecs they built in stone, and decorated their buildings with interesting carvings.

There were many other tribes besides those mentioned, such as the Totonacs near the Gulf of Mexico, the Zapotecs to the south, and the Tarascans to the west.

These were the peoples Cortés found and conquered in the name of Spain. They had different languages and different customs but through all the tribes ran a fundamental pattern, and the dominant thread of that pattern was religion.

Religion was the essence of their living, and it was a dancing religion.[4] In the dance they found a bold, spontaneous outlet for emotions aroused by religious fervor. There were dances in connection with all temple services and tribal ceremonies. The people danced to beseech their gods for rain, and to appease them when their anger had been incurred. They danced to commemorate their feast days and to celebrate their victories. No bloody sacrificial rite was complete without its accompanying dance. Sometimes hundreds of dancers took part.

Jiménez[5] states that their concept of the dance was essentially metaphysical. A forgetfulness of nature was indicated in the general austerity, the geometrical pattern, and the extravagance of the dancers' costumes. Nobles were sumptuously garbed while the common men disguised themselves as animals, with costumes of feathers and skins, and masks of wood or leather. This use of the mask imposed a kind of super reality; together with the fantastic costumes it bordered on the occult. Plumes,

[4] Erna Fergusson, *Fiesta in Mexico*, p. 10.

[5] Guillermo Jiménez, "The Dance in Mexico," *Bulletin of the Pan-American Union*, LXXV, (June 1941), No. 6, pp. 317 ff.

tinsel, mirrors, crystal beads, spangles, and other glittering trappings effaced the human figure. The widespread use of copal, pulque, peyote, and marihuana completed this attempt to live in a world of unreality.

All the children learned to dance. Teachers assigned to temples schooled the children in choreography. Occasionally the women danced but generally only the men performed. For music they used sea shells, tortoise shells, bells, cowhorns, rattles, huéhuetls, and teponaztlis. The huehuetl was an upright, hollow log, covered with skin, which was beaten with the palm of the hand or the fingers; the teponaztle was also a drum but it was laid on its side and was played by rubber-tipped sticks. All these instruments produced slow, prolonged, and tedious rhythms. They were a powerful factor in making the indigenous dancer the automaton he was. In Greece, India, and Persia sensual movements were accentuated, and all manner of ornaments were used to lure the senses. But not so with the Indian. His attitudes, gestures, and movements were strictly mechanical, marked by no trace of self-consciousness.

Though the dance differed in different regions, the theories behind them were identical. This parallel ideology made it easy for the Aztecs to impose their gods on subject peoples or even to accept the deities of the conquered. Thus was the stage set for the arrival of Cortés, and for the coming of the Catholic priests to Christianize the conquered. The fact that the Indians were used to admitting new gods to their temples simplified the work of the priests. Sometimes the Aztecs moved the new god in beside the old. Sometimes they repudiated the old god altogether. The transition from the native ceremonies to the ritual of the Catholic Church was easy to a people who loved outward show and symbolism. The rich vestments of the priests, the symbolic lights, the strange chant in an unknown tongue all seemed to harmonize with their pagan rites.[6] In turn, the priests found much in the old native customs which were easily transplanted to the new religion.[7] Incense, holy oils and holy waters, penitence, and fasting were commonplace.

Drama, too, was a part of the everyday life of the Indian. Aztec actors were thoroughly trained and audiences were keenly appreciative of good performances. The priests realized that the theatre and drama were excellent media for teaching the new religion and the history of the empire

[6] Charles S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico*, pp. 61–75.
[7] Fanny Gooch Iglehart, *Face to Face With the Mexicans*, p. 243.

of which Mexico was now a part. So they permitted the continuance of the pantomime, comedy, plays, and tableaux they had found, but substituted Christian themes for the heathen ones. The ritual dances were supplied with Christian scenarios and symbols, but the steps and music remained unchanged. For four hundred years the Church has made compromise after compromise in her effort to Christianize these peoples, but they stubbornly remain more than half pagan.[8] They cling to old customs and old traditions, and under the thin veneer of their Catholicism, there can be readily detected the pagan attributes of the Mexican folk.

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[8] Chase, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

CHAPTER III

DANCES NATIVE TO THE STATE OF MEXICO AND ITS NEIGHBORS: GUANAJUATO, MORELOS, AND HIDALGO

WHEN we write a letter to Mexico City, the address is Mexico, D.F. The D.F. stands for *Distrito Federal,* or Federal District, and it corresponds to our District of Columbia. It is situated more than 7,000 feet above sea level and lies snugly in the state of Mexico, in the southwest part of the great and beautiful valley of the same name. It is with the dances of this region that this chapter is concerned. Included are those of the neighboring states of Guanajuato, Morelos, and Hidalgo.

The outstanding dance in the Federal District and near-by states represents the battles between Moors and Christians, in which the Christians always conquer. This dance is called *Los Moros.* Another popular dance in the same region, including Guanajuato, is *Los Apaches,* which the dancers perform in fulfilment of their pledge to a saint.

Most widespread of the children's dances is *Las Pastoras.* This is performed by two rows of little girls dressed in white with little sombreros hanging down their backs on bright ribbons, and bearing staffs adorned with bells. They, too, dance in fulfilment of a promise to a saint.

Los Chinelos is performed in the Morelos villages from January to Easter. This is a very peculiar dance; and the peculiarity lies in the fact that the performers leap, rather than dance.

La Virgen y las Fieras, the Virgin and the Beasts, is danced in various Otomi villages in the state of Hidalgo. It is based on an Otomi legend of a virgin who lost her way in the forest. It depicts the animals that lived there and how they answered her cry of distress and drove off the malign spirits who frightened her. In its music, costumes, masks, and accessories this dance unmistakably carries the characteristic indigenous stamp of the culture of this region.

A. LOS MOROS

Los Moros is a good example of a dance that was taught the Indians by the early missionaries as a substitute for a native dance; and of the ingenuity of the monks in turning the warlike instincts of the Indians into

tools for their conversion to Christianity. The theme of this dance is the struggle between Moors and Christians, in which St. James appears and in which the Christians always conquer.

Los Moros enter the churchyard gate and come forward doing their little skipping step to suggest men on horseback. The Moors, five in number, wear helmets, flounced skirts, and black goggles; the four Christians have knee breeches, capes, and plumed hats. Núñez states that both groups of performers wear many bells which jingle clamorously with each movement of the dance which goes as follows:

"The two opposing sections, face to face, advance raising first one foot and then the other in a rather pronounced measure, the while they move to the sound of a fife and drum until they meet. Whereupon, swords clash, are twirled above their heads and both sides recede to their original position to begin over again."[1]

Their excellent dancing and their hand-to-hand fighting are thrilling to behold; but their texts are long and dull, and as the dancers are few in number they lack the plastic beauty of large groups dancing in colorful pagan dress.[2]

B. LOS APACHES

Los Apaches is a religious dance, and like all their religious dances, is performed in fulfilment of a pledge to a saint. They march up to the altar and there they dance for his enjoyment. Redfield describes Los Apaches as follows:

"They wear tall, plumed headdresses, embroidered with beads and small mirrors, pink or red blouses, short red skirts with bead and shell pendants, colored stockings and sandals. Some are women; most are men, who wear long false hair."[3]

Toor[4] comments on the elegance of their dress: the feather kilt in rows of different colors—red, blue, yellow, purple; the very high circular feather headdress of variegated colors, with small mirrors in front and back; the anklets of bells and feathers; the leather masks made and

[1] José de J. Núñez y Domínguez, "Dance of the Moors and Spaniards," *Mexican Folkways,* III, (1927), p. 200.

[2] Frances Toor, *Mexican Folkways,* V (1929), p. 60.

[3] Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlán, a Mexican Village,* p. 104.

[4] Toor, *op. cit.,* pp. 18 f.

painted by a traditional mask-maker in Puebla in very beautiful colors and designs.

After they have paid their respects to the saint in the church they go outside and forming a circle, they stamp the ground with many intricate steps to simple rhythms. Their music is furnished by the *armadillo*, a stringed instrument shaped like a mandolin.[5]

C. LAS PASTORAS

Most widespread of the children's dances, and just as serious and joyless as the dances of the adults, is *Las Pastoras,* so-called because the little girls who dance it are dressed as shepherdesses. The purpose of this dance is also the fulfilment of a promise to a saint.

The church is filled with people; the altar is lit with many candles, and decorated with paper rosettes, wax flowers, and garlands. Two rows of little girls usually dressed in white, and with little sombreros hanging down their backs on vivid ribbons, are ready for the dance. They carry in their hands shepherd staffs, adorned with bells and ribbons.[6] They sing simple tunes accompanied by an old man with a violin, and as they sing they turn round and round and keep time with their beribboned staffs.[7]

D. LOS CHINELOS

Los Chinelos, or "The Leapers", is especially associated with the carnival, particularly with those of many villages of northern Morelos. Redfield[8] says this dance is in no real respect religious; its meaning is secular, quite different from the religious significance of *Los Moros* or *Los Apaches*. No saint is celebrated, no candles are burned. It is danced solely for the fun and enjoyment it gives both performers and spectators.

There is no certain explanation of the name or the origin of this dance. Fergusson[9] suggests that since *chinelas* are pattens (wooden-shoes) worn in parts of Spain in wet weather, maybe these dances originated in that region; or that maybe the first clog dancers used shoes of this

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[5] Frances Toor, *Guide to Mexico,* p. 94.

[6] Redfield, *op. cit.,* p. 120.

[7] Frances Toor, *Mexican Folkways,* V (1929), p. 61.

[8] Robert Redfield, "El Carnaval en Tepoztlán, Morelos," *Mexican Folkways,* V (1929), pp. 30–34.

[9] Erna Fergusson, *Fiesta in Mexico,* p. 15.

type. Redfield[10] says that the word *Chinelos* is probably from *Chino,* "Chinese," "foreign."

The Chinelos gather in the chapel and at the first strains of the traditional "leaping" music, they begin to move toward the plaza, jumping up and down with the high, short, prancing step that is traditional. Redfield describes them as follows:

"They wear long gowns of satin, blue or pink or yellow, with a square cape hanging from the shoulder. The color and the design of the embroidery vary, but each dancer wears the same long gown with a cape, the same staring mask with recurved black beard of horsehair, the same huge sombrero, beaded and surmounted with an ostrich plume. Each wears gloves and carries a handkerchief filled with confetti."[11]

Fergusson also gives an interesting description:

"Their costumes are long satin gowns with capes embroidered with the name of the barrio or the society, and often elaborately beaded. This work is done by women, but the men trim their own hats; sombreros turned up into cup-shapes and adorned with beads, mirrors, spangles, and ostrich plumes. There is nothing cheap about a Chinelo. They also wear masks; often gorgeously decorated."[12]

Hour after hour the leaping continues. The bands take turns playing. The "leaping" music continues, with the drum accenting very markedly the first of each triplet. Hundreds of people watch the spectacle, delighted with the clowning and antics of the leapers. Delirious laughter greets their jokes which they utter in falsetto. It is, indeed, *El Carnaval!*

E. LA VIRGEN Y LAS FIERAS

The Virgin and the Beasts is danced in various Otomi villages in the state of Hidalgo. Based on an Otomi legend, it contains no Christian flavor, at least in its original form. The following is Mérida's account of this ancient Indian legend:

"The Virgin comes out of her hut and enters the forest, enticed by the trills of the birds and the enchantment of the flowers. When she is deep in the woods, she realizes that she has lost her way. Her situation becomes dangerous

[10] Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlán, a Mexican Village,* p. 111.
[11] *Loc. cit.*
[12] Fergusson, *op. cit.,* pp. 15 f.

when she is attacked by unfriendly presences. She asks for help from the animals who love her. At her call, there appear lions, tigers, wolves, bulls, deer and all kinds of animals who shield her, beat off the malign spirits, and save her."[13]

Schwendener and Tibbels describe the costumes:

"The part of the Virgin is taken by a girl ten or twelve years of age who wears a simple white muslin dress with a blue belt on which the design of the cross is embroidered in beautiful colors. Her crown is made of wild forest flowers which are also woven into her long braids of hair hanging forward over each shoulder. On her feet the Virgin wears rough homemade sandals.

"Some 12 or 14 men represent the beasts. The men are dressed in bright colored shirts to which are attached capes drawn tightly around the shoulders and falling a little below the waist. The only adornment of the cape is found in its highly ornate collar which the dancers themselves decorate with countless beads made of paper. The short knee-length skirts are generously covered with embroidery and circles cut from tin. When masks are used they are made of pasteboard in imitation of the various animals to be impersonated and cover not only the face but the entire head as well. . . . . .

Of the multitude of evil spirits to which the legend refers, only two, Death and the Devil, are visible and take part in the dance."[14]

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[13] Carlos Mérida, "La Virgen y las Fieras," *Theatre Arts Monthly* (August, 1938), p. 567.

[14] Norma Schwendener and Averil Tibbels, "La Virgen y las Fieras," *Legends and Dances of Old Mexico*, pp. 71 f.

CHAPTER IV

DANCES NATIVE TO THE WESTERN STATES OF JALISCO, MICHOACAN, AND SONORA

This chapter discusses the dances native to the three western states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Sonora, all of which border on the Pacific. Jalisco lies west of Mexico City. It is a land of sunshine and gayety. Its capital, Guadalajara, is often compared to Seville because of its climate and beautiful women. This favorable soil for music and dances was the birthplace of the *jarabe,* the most popular dance in Mexico. More centrally located, Michoacán, with its gorgeous flowers and rushing waterfalls, is another region where one would expect to find music and dancing. The most popular dance of Michoacán is the *canacuas,* celebrated at weddings and receptions for honored guests. Here, too, is found the picturesque *Danza de los Viejitos.* Nowhere could greater contrast to these two regions be found than in Sonora in its isolated position in the far northwestern corner of the republic. Here live the indomitable Yaqui Indians, and in their *Pascola, Venado,* and other animal dances has been preserved the truly primitive character of these people.

A. THE JARABE

The *Jarabe* is the most popular and widespread of the folk dances in Mexico. It is danced in the villages, and in the cities; in the theatres and out-of-doors; at festivals and on many other occasions. Indians in remote villages and city-dwellers acclaim it alike, although their interpretations differ widely. Today the Jarabe Tapatío is so universally known that it has been officially designated the National Folk Dance of Mexico.

The Jarabe is among the oldest of Mexican dances, so old in fact that it is impossible to discover its true origin. However, it has been given a geographic place of birth. It is generally conceded that the Jarabe originated in the state of Jalisco, and has been called Jarabe Tapatío, since Tapatío is the name applied to anything and everything coming from Jalisco.[1]

[1] Norma Schwendener and Averil Tibbels, *Legends and Dances of Old Mexico,* p. 3.

The significance of the word "jarabe" cannot be so easily determined. Its literal meaning is a sweet syrup. Why the dance has this appellation is controversial. Garner suggests two interesting reasons:

"I do not know even how the name came to be, some people say that it came from jarabe's being the name of a syrup which was poured over snow or ice in the early days, and which formed a favorite refreshment for people sitting around in a square or patio. Dancing was liable to start, and so—jarabe. Some people say that it was the spoon going around in the delicious syrup and the dancers going around and around the hat used in the dance—anyway, jarabes."[2]

Fergusson[3] says that the term is applied to the saccharine quality in the demure coquetting of the girl as she dances with her partner.

The Jarabe without doubt began to be danced in the colonial period.[4] Its steps indicate it is an adaptation of some of the Spanish dances. The lively music and spirited steps show distinct Spanish influence. The steps of this dance, and of all others introduced by the Spaniards, are called *zapateados,* from *zapatear* meaning to beat time with the shoes. The resultant staccato effect has given rise to the story that the Mexicans were so impressed by the horses which were brought into their country by their Spanish conquerors, that the dance grew out of imitation of the pawing and prancing of these animals.[5] It is certainly true that the steps of the Jarabe seem to imitate the clicking of hoofs.

Others believe that the Jarabe was first danced in the early part of the 18th century by an Indian princess, a descendant of the Indian Queen of Tonala, and thereafter the dance was so popular that it became a customary form of amusement at both public and private gatherings.

Two utterly distinct versions of the Jarabe exist, the one Mexican and the other Indian. The Mexican Jarabe is definitely a dance of courtship; it represents the *Charro's* wooing of the *China Poblana.* Usually a song is sung before the dance begins. "Let us unite our hearts, Charro and China dancing!" ". . . the emotion with which they are trembling"; ". . . male dove and lady dove, billing and cooing with love"; and "the kiss is only the net, I want to drink the river!" The short birdlike steps of

[2] Bess Adams Garner, *Mexico Notes in the Margin,* p. 12.
[3] Erna Fergusson, *Fiesta in Mexico,* p. 20.
[4] Frances Toor, *Mexican Folkways,* VI (1930), p. 30.
[5] Schwendener and Tibbels, *op. cit.,* p. 3.

the Charro and the dainty coquetting of the China further carry out the theme of the courtship of doves.

The music is composed of nine gayly captivating melodies and of as many different steps. The entire dance takes about ten minutes. In the beginning the dancers face each other. The man dances with his hands behind him, his body slightly bent, and he circles around the girl with short, quick steps. She alternately advances and retreats, now accepting, now refusing; but always dainty and provocative. He is persistent, and when he throws his hat at her feet in token of his love she accepts him by dancing daintily around the brim. Then as she stoops to pick it up, he swings his right leg over her. Now they are both hilariously happy because he has won her, and the music quickens in tempo and becomes passionate and fiery. They finish facing the audience and bowing to the applause.

The costume worn in the Jarabe is as captivating as the dance itself. The girl wears the China Poblana dress. This consists of a full red skirt with a green yoke, richly embroidered with sequins in geometric figures; the national emblem is a favorite design. It falls loosely to the ankles and from its hem peeps a dainty, befrilled, lace-trimmed petticoat. The white, short-sleeved blouse, cut square in the neck, has a yoke which is also heavily embroidered. A green, silk *rebozo* (scarf) goes around the waist in front, crosses in the back, and the ends are allowed to dangle. A red-white-and-green ribbon is worn around the head. Red or green high-heeled slippers add more color. When the China rides, she wears a man's sombrero. Fergusson makes an amusing comment about this costume:

"They say that a Chinese woman brought the skirt to Puebla; hence the name. But the rebozo is Spanish, the hat is masculine, and the shoes are French. So the costume is Mexican only in that it is as heterogeneous as the influences that have made Mexico."[6]

The Charro wears long, tight-fitting trousers trimmed with braid and many silver buttons, a short leather jacket, a soft flowing tie, a sombrero braided in silver and gold, and a gay sarape. What the Charro will spend to enhance his magnificence and that of his horse is limited only by his station in life and his financial resources.

The Jarabe has left its religion and is now a regular part of all fiestas

[6] Erna Fergusson, *Fiesta in Mexico*, p. 20.

in cities and villages throughout the republic. Outside Jalisco the best Jarabes are found in the neighboring states of Guanajuato, Colima, and Nayarit. The village Jarabes are different from the conventionalized ones of the cities. The difference in the psychology and actions of the village folk naturally affects the interpretation and appearance of the dance. Often it is danced spontaneously wherever there are people and music. The girls wear full, long black flannel skirts and the usual embroidered *camisa* and *rebozo;* the men wear the charro suit of the rancher.

Still different is the Indian version of the Jarabe. The steps are simple. The zest and fire of the Mexican dance are entirely missing. It is danced modestly by maidens with downcast eyes. They are never coquettish and their method of appeal to the opposite sex does not include make-up and short skirts. They dance with their feet only, never moving the upper part of their bodies. No costume other than that worn at the moment is used. The idea of the Indian Jarabe is closely associated with food. The dance is used at Indian weddings. While the musicians play the Jarabe Tapatío, the parents of the bride dance with plates of food in their hands, and the guests with jars of *pulque* on their heads.

B. THE CANACUAS

One of the loveliest and most Indian of all the folk dances is the Canacuas of Michoacán. Alcaraz[7] says that the Canacuas came into being under the guidance of Fray Juan de San Miguel, founder of Uruapán, a city in Michoacán. San Miguel arranged many kinds of gatherings to bring the Indians together in order to foster unity among them. It was in keeping with the Indian custom to celebrate in music and song each important event in a man's life, as birth, marriage, death. In the special festivities arranged for the marriage ceremony is found the origin of the Canacuas.

According to Domínguez[8] the Canacuas originated in the town of San Pedro-Paracho, also in Michoacán. Today as then, Paracho is famous for the making of musical instruments, as well as for its accomplished musicians and composers.

Canacuas is the Tarascan word for crowns. The explanation of the

[7] Angela Alcaraz, "Las Canacuas," *Mexican Folkways,* VI (1930), p. 117.

[8] Francisco Domínguez, "Ancient Dance of the Guari," *Mexican Folkways,* VI (1930), pp. 110–116.

name has been lost for there are no crowns used in the ceremony. The nearest semblance to a crown is a branch of yellow flowers, arranged in a traditional manner, which is called *súchil.*

A group of *guaris,* or unmarried girls, get together and agree to offer canacuas to a special guest who has just arrived on a visit to the town. They dress for the dance in the regional dress. This consists of a black or dark blue skirt gathered slightly in the front but laid in deep plaits in the back. These plaits extend above the waistline about three inches, forming a fan-shaped ruffle called a *rollo.* An exquisitely embroidered white *camisa* or blouse is worn tucked into the skirt. The rebozo, dark blue with wide white stripes, is crossed over the shoulders and tied in back. The guari wears an apron which is about three inches shorter than the skirt and which has some rows of embroidery across it just below the knees. Many strings of colorful beads, earrings, and bright hair ribbons complete the costume.

Each guari carries a beautifully lacquered *jícara,* or bowl, with a napkin in it on which are set gifts of flowers, fruit, and many objects carved from wood, such as chocolate beaters, and miniature musical instruments.

Placing themselves in two lines they face each other and begin by singing a song of greeting and welcome. They offer the fiesta to the guest and then proceed with the most beautiful part of the ceremony. Not only is the movement of the *jícaras* and skirts extremely graceful but here is sung the loveliest of the Tarascan melodies, "La Flor de Canela" ("The Cinnamon Flower"). "At the cinnamon flower I sigh, because it reminds me of you..." After this they form three lines, the first seated, the second kneeling, the third standing; and sing two more songs. Then after a dialogue between one of the guaris and an Indian man who always accompanies the canacuas, the couple dance a jarabe. This outburst of gayety is followed by a sweet, sad love-plaint, "La Flor de Changunga", in which with true Tarascan feeling one of the guaris laments an unrequited love in a tone of utter sadness. This melancholy interlude is succeeded by a gay chorus. It is time for the guaris to present themselves in turn to the guest and offer him the canacuas. One of the principal guaris carries in her hand the *súchil.* By some it is taken to mean welcome, and by others the virginity of the guari; while she is dancing she offers it to the guest of honor but draws it back immediately, and preserves it to the end without losing a single petal. The last movement is

the petition. It is tradition that whatever the guaris ask of the visitor at this moment must be granted and fulfilled to the letter.

The most delicate *purepecha* or Tarascan music is used for the Canacuas. The music must have been transformed from the European. It is beautiful, romantic, and dreamy—characteristics of the music of hot, luxuriant countries.

C. LA DANZA DE LOS VIEJITOS

The Dance of the Little Old Men dates back many centuries and is among the finest to be seen in the whole republic.[9] Johnston describes it as a very funny dance from the shores of Lake Pátzcuaro in the state of Michoacán.[10] It is one of the few Mexican dances that is of the humorous type. Definitely comical, it never fails to elicit much merriment and laughter. Four youths dressed like old men perform. They make themselves look old by using masks with wrinkled cheeks and snaggle-toothed grins; and by leaning forward heavily on their crooked canes so as to appear feeble and shrunken in stature.

The steps vary according to the artistry of the leader, but they all demand great agility, endurance, and muscular control. More often than not the dance is unaccompanied save for the tapping of the canes and the feet of the dancers. Their shoes are specially built in order that the rhythm of the dance may be more strongly accented. Sometimes the leader carries a *jarana,* an instrument which resembles a ukulele.

The costumes are as amusing and original as the dance itself. The viejitos wear a shirt and trousers of unbleached muslin. The trousers are cut extremely wide at the bottom and are sometimes edged with lace. A *gabán* with fringed ends is worn over the shirt. Stringy white hair hangs from beneath the wide, shallow-crowned hats. A crooked cane adds to the general effectiveness.

D. THE PASCOLA AND VENADO

Sonora is a state of desert and mountain and seashore. Here live the Yaqui Indians, generally considered savage and dangerous. Regardless of churches, schools and army the Yaqui is essentially an unregenerate and unconquered Indian. Two of the Yaqui dances are known as the

[9] Burton Holmes, *Mexico,* p. 323.
[10] Edith Johnston, *Regional Dances of Mexico,* p. 37.

Pascola and the Venado. They are truly primitive in execution and music. Fergusson[11] tells us that the word Pascola implies merriment; and since it is danced at a child's funeral, the connection probably lies in the cheer intended for the little angel. Its primitive character and extraordinary dignity make this one of the most striking of all the dances. It is thoroughly Indian in feeling and in rhythm and is danced with true Indian absorption in the task at hand. The following from Ledesma describes the music:

"Its impressive music, played on a flute of cane (made with admirable technical perfection) and accompanied by rhythmic beats on a percussion instrument resembling a small box and known as a *caja* blends with the soft rustle of dry cocoons fastened to the legs of the dancer, the tinkling of tiny bells which hang from his belt and the thud of soft shod feet which mark the time of the music and interpret its melody."[12]

The representation of the *venado* or deer in the dance of that name depicts the nervous and vigilant attitudes of the deer when he goes down to the stream to drink. The dancer who takes the part of the deer is wrapped in skins and wears a deer head with branching antlers. Others take the part of coyotes. The coyotes pursue the deer and the chase that ensues is the theme of the dance. This dance has a really savage grandeur. Strong, picturesque, and spectacular, it is one of the best preserved of the native Mexican dances.[13]

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[11] Erna Fergusson, *Fiesta in Mexico,* p. 184.

[12] Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, "Five Folkloric Dances," *Mexican Art and Life,* No. 6 (April, 1939), n.p.

[13] "Folk Dances in Mexico," *Some Latin American Festivals and Folk Dances,* Bulletin of the Pan-American Union (Feb. and Nov., 1939), p. 19.

CHAPTER V

DANCES NATIVE TO THE EASTERN STATES OF VERACRUZ AND TAMAULIPAS

The states of Veracruz and Tamaulipas lie along the eastern coast bordering the Gulf of Mexico. Here in the villages the *Huapango* is a popular folk dance and is second in importance only to the Jarabe. It is danced on a platform to highly complicated, rapid music and in fast, intricate steps. In the villages the specially constructed platforms are rustic and picturesque.

In the city of Veracruz, so named by Cortés because he landed there on Good Friday in the year 1519, there are many Cuban negroes who have brought with them the lively music and dances of their homeland. As a result, the sensuous *danzones* and *rumbas* compete with the native huapangos in popularity.

About fifty miles from the quaint and delightfully old-fashioned Spanish city of Jalapa, capital of Veracruz, is Papantla situated in the heart of a fertile region famous for its cacao and vanilla. The journey there lies through dense forests of bamboo and royal palms, tangled masses of tropical plants, canyons, streams and waterfalls. The fragrance of drying vanilla beans permeates even the jungle trail. Here live the Totonacs, descendants of the Indians who helped Cortés in his march against the Aztecs. Their customs and costumes have remained practically unchanged since the days before the conquest. On the Feast of Corpus Christi, two months after Easter, they dance their strange and amazing *Dance of the Flying Pole.*

A. THE HUAPANGO

The Huapango is the dance of the platform, as its name signifies. The word *huapango* is derived from the Aztec *cuahpanco, cuaitl* meaning log or wood, *ipan,* on or over, and *co,* place.[1] The platforms constructed in the villages are sometimes raised high on posts or tree trunks; others have roofs covered with hay.

At one time the Huapango was danced by the upper classes in Vera-

[1] Frances Toor, "Mexican Folk Dances," *Renascent Mexico* (Herring and Weinstock, editors), p. 188.

cruz but it has become the dance of the *mestizos* living in the Indian tradition. It constitutes the most important part of their festivities and their chief source of fun. The men go to the Huapango to select their future brides.

As with many other dances of Mexico, the men and women face each other in rows. When the music starts the man does not ask the girl to dance but steps in front of her and raises his hat. She rises and together they take their places in the dance. Back and forth they move, the man moving around the girl with eyes straight ahead, body rigid to the waist, and a wholly impersonal demeanor. She, if possible, is even more impersonal. Every now and then the music changes, and this is the signal for the dancers to change places.

This dance is done in ordinary dress. Sometimes the workers go to the Huapango straight from the fields, carrying with them the odor of the earth they till, wearing their working clothes, their cutlasses still in their belts, and green sprigs in their hats.[2] The girl wears a long *huipil* (blouse) over a long skirt, (like those worn by her ancestors) with ribbons and flowers interwoven in her hair. Both wear shoes to help emphasize the beat of the music. The peculiar Huapango rhythm is further accented by bringing down the closed fist or open hand on the strings of the guitar for the last note of each measure. The music is a strange mixture of Spanish and Mexican themes. "Its cross rhythms," says Durán, "could be nothing else but Mexican. One instrument will play 2/4 meter, the other in 3/4 meter, and a third in 6/8. This combination results in a dazzling and unique musical texture."[3]

Sometimes after the dance is well underway, a group of men begin to sing verses in falsetto or queer high-pitched voices. Some of these verses are as beautiful as any in the Spanish language.

Farther north in Tamaulipas the Huapango has reached a high development. Here there is one platform for the dancers and another for the musicians. The dance itself is gayer and more worldly. There are more turns and variations, and the dancers even seem aware of each other. Very skillful dancers using only their feet can tie and untie a silken scarf as it lies on the floor, and never lose the step. The other dancers stand aside

[2] Norma Schwendener and Averil Tibbels, *Legends and Dances of Old Mexico,* p. 13.

[3] Gustavo Durán, *Recordings of Latin American Songs and Dances,* Music Series 3, Pan-American Union (January, 1942), pp. 43 f.

and applaud. Another expert huapangero may exhibit his skill by balancing some object on his head while dancing. But the climax of a Huapango lies in the rivalry for a girl. The rivals may begin with verses, one suitor insulting the girl, the other defending her; and they may end with machetes or knives. "For", as Fergusson says, "this is tropical Mexico and everything is lush: vegetation, love, vengeance."[4] Anything may happen—and does!

B. THE DANCE OF THE FLYING POLE

This dance is one of the few pre-Cortesian ceremonies which persist practically untouched by modern life. Folk stories tell us that the Totonacs, with whom it is traditional, are said to have originated in the seven caves of the lake region where Mexico City now stands and that they fled for safety to the Sierra de Puebla.[5] Here the customs and costumes have changed little since the Conquest. When it rains, the men slip on sleeveless cotton garments, waterproofed by being covered with several coats of home-made rubber paint. Most of the Totonac women dress in white. They spend a great deal of time fixing their hair. Not content with the amount they have, they add to it a number of heavy rolls of black wool, interlaced with gaily colored ribbons. This arrangement towers a foot or more above the forehead. Strangely enough, the rebozo is not worn here.

In many towns of the Totonac region the Dance of the Flying Pole (or *Los Voladores,* the Fliers, as it is also called) is danced on the day of the local patron saint. In Papantla the dance is presented during the Feast of Corpus Christi which has become traditional in this village.[6]

"Of those age old rites", states Larsen, "which still survive among the Indians of remote villages in Mexico one of the most interesting and spectacular is the strange dance of the flying pole."[7] The following is a summary from her account of the dance as she saw it:

In the center of the plaza towered the flying pole almost seventy feet high and as straight as a mast. More than a hundred Indians had dragged it from some mountain slope to fulfill its destiny as part of the ceremony about to take place. With levers and ropes the heavy pole was lifted little

[4] Fergusson, *op. cit.,* p. 25.
[5] *Ibid.,* p. 167.
[6] Burton Holmes, *Mexico,* p. 390.
[7] Helga Larsen, "The Mexican Indian Flying Pole Dance," National Geographic, LXXI, 3, p. 387 (March, 1937).

by little from the ground and slid into a deep narrow hole. Into this hole the Indians had previously placed their offerings—a live turkey, candles, cigarettes, and chocolate—in order to nourish the pole and make it strong enough to hold the fliers.

The ceremony of the *Volador* is supposed to be intimately connected with the Indian calendar. It is believed to represent the Indian "century" or cycle of fifty-two years which they divided into four groups of thirteen years each. In olden days there were always four fliers—dressed to represent birds, probably the four sacred birds guarding the four cardinal points of the compass—each flier corresponding to one of the four chief points of the compass. The fliers made thirteen rounds each before reaching the ground: that was 4 x 13 or 52, the number of years in the cycle. This symbolism is almost entirely forgotten.

Before the voladores appeared the pole was made ready. Thick vines were twisted around the tree to afford a foothold. A short, hollowed-out section was fitted to the top of the pole like a thimble on a finger but left free to revolve, and six ropes were carefully wound around the pole below it. The ropes were attached to a frame made of six sticks which was hung just below the thimble. On the top of the thimble was the dance floor, twenty-four inches exactly in diameter, and not level at that. Now everything was ready.

Out came the voladores, six instead of the traditional four, in bright red costumes with two bandannas crossed in back vaguely resembling wings. Five were dressed as men and one as Malinche. Almost all Mexican dances have a Malinche, or Man-woman.

One by one they climbed to the lofty height. Once at the top they sat down in the frame and supported their bodies by thrusting their feet against the pole. They looked very small—like bright rag dolls.

One stepped to the platform and danced. One volador played a small drum, another a flute, while the rest accompanied him with rattles. Faster went the music; faster the dancer whirled and leaped on the tiny platform of death. Each volador danced about ten minutes. Then all tied the ends of the ropes around their waists and with a piercing cry launched themselves into space.

For one breathless moment they hung along the pole, five of them head-down for Malinche is the only one who flies head-up. Then down they came in a steady crescendo of ever widening circles.

As they gained momentum and the ropes slowly unwound, the effect of flying was perfect. The voladores reached the ground, swinging gracefully around and landing lightly on their feet. The dance was over; no accidents this time. A thrill of pride and satisfaction ran over the crowd for the voladores are much loved by the people, in fact they enjoy the same admiration and worship given the bull-fighters in Mexico, D. F.[8]

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 390 f.

CHAPTER VI

DANCES NATIVE TO THE SOUTHERN STATES OF OAXACA AND GUERRERO AND TO THE PENINSULA OF YUCATAN

One of the most colorful regions of all Mexico is in the southern states of Oaxaca and Guerrero and on the peninsula of Yucatán in the extreme southeast.

Oaxaca, the birthplace of Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz, is situated in the lovely Valley of Oaxaca and extends from the jungles of Tehuántepec on the Pacific coast to the Cordilleran highlands. Here the two arms of the Sierra Madre Range come close together and both lie within the state. It is one of the most mountainous regions on the American continent. Lying amid the mountains are a number of fertile valleys that produce every imaginable kind of vegetation. The population is chiefly Indian; the principal races being the Zapotecs and the Mixtecs. These two peoples once fought each other savagely until they had to combine against their common enemy, the Aztecs, and later against the Spaniards. The Spanish invasion with its ultimate victory is commemorated in the *Dance of the Conquest,* the most important and popular dance in this region.

In the state of Oaxaca is the city of Tehuántepec on the isthmus of the same name. Tehuantepec cannot compete in archeological interest with other parts of the state, e.g., Mitla and Monte Albán; it is the people—their customs, history, and legends—that make Tehuántepec famous. Whatever other claims to fame it may have, it is known chiefly for its beautiful women, the Tehuanas. Their size—for they are tall—their queenly carriage, their style of dress, their independent spirit and air of confidence make them conspicuous among Indian women. The regional folk dance is the *Sandunga* with music as sensuous, romantic, and beautiful as the low, hot, verdant tropics from which it came.

Guerrero, another southern state on the Pacific, is still remote enough from the center of new ideas to celebrate its fiestas in the old way. Here are performed many animal dances purely pagan in origin, but dedicated to Christian saints and danced only at religious festivals. Among the

dances of fish, cocks, and tigers offered to the Virgin, the lively and entertaining *La Danza de los Tigres,* is perhaps the most typical of the region.

In the extreme southeastern part of Mexico is the Peninsula of Yucatán which juts far out into the Gulf of Mexico. Since this region has always been practically inaccessible to the rest of the country, its people do not consider themselves to be Mexicans at all, but prefer to be called Yucatecans. The popular folk dance of Yucatán is the *Jarana* which takes its name from a small stringed musical instrument. The Yucatecans have a well-deserved reputation for being the cleanest people on earth—everybody bathes a couple of times a day and everybody dresses in immaculate white. So the impression of the dance is an exquisite, crisp, and dazzling whiteness.

A. DANCE OF THE CONQUEST

This dance is also known as *La Danza de las Plumas,* or the Feather Dance, so-called because of the magnificent feather headdresses worn by the Indians in its presentation. It is a dramatization of the Conquest in which the Indians dance happily the story of their own defeat. The history of the dance is obscure. Yet it is felt that it is another instance where the Spaniards turned Indian custom to their own uses, supplying the story part themselves but using the costumes, steps, and dance formation of the Indians.

The participants are a group of Spaniards headed by Cortés and a group of Indians headed by Moctezuma. Cortés and his men dress in curious old-fashioned soldier uniforms, while Moctezuma and his warriors wear elaborate silk robes with gorgeous feathered and mirrored headpieces some three feet high which emphasize every long, swinging movement of the dance.

The story begins with word being brought to Moctezuma of the landing of the strangers. He sends a messenger. Cortés demands an audience. The Spaniards arrive and the two races face each other in dancing rows. Although the dances are beautiful, there are long, wearying speeches and awkward pauses. With Moctezuma there are two girls, one called Reina Xóchil and the other Malinche. According to d'Harnoncourt,

"The first sign of the coming tragedy is given, in the dance, when Malinche moves from the side of Moctezuma to that of Cortés, a gesture symbolizing the very tragic historical fact that this Indian girl, who interpreted for Cortés,

informing him of the customs and habits of the Aztecs, had an important part in bringing about the downfall of the empire of Moctezuma."[1]

This downfall is faithfully reproduced as the dance progresses. The drama drags on to its tragic end; the Aztecs are vanquished. Each warrior takes off his feathers, and as his proud and lofty headdress mingles with the dust, he permits himself to be manacled by the conqueror who faces him.[2]

B. THE SANDUNGA

The Sandunga, although limited to the Isthmus of Tehuántepec is well known throughout Mexico because of the beauty of the music and the dancers. The Tehuanas, as the women of Tehuántepec are called, have a graceful and queenly carriage and an air of independence not found in other Indian women. The word *sandunga* is a colloquial Spanish word meaning winsomeness, gracefulness, fascination. The music and steps are also Spanish. Although the origin of the Sandunga is unknown there are several legends concerning it. Toor[3] tells the pretty one that it developed out of the desire of friends to console a lovelorn maiden by bringing her flowers and by dancing and singing for her. Fergusson gives us another version:

"The story of the Sandunga is that once a Tehuana mother, by sacrifice and deprivation, managed to save enough to send her son, Máximo Órtiz, to Oaxaca to study. She knew by intuition that he was an artist and she wished him to perfect himself in poetry and music. In the capital Máximo was busy until one day they brought him word that his beautiful mother was dying and that he probably could not reach her in time. It was a six-day journey, but Máximo galloped day and night, confident that he would be in time to receive his mother's last blessing. But at the very moment when he rode into the patio of their humble home, the mother died, and her noble brow was still warm for his filial kiss. Desolated that she had not lived to speak one word to him, Máximo burst into a lament. "Why, Mother, did you not wait to speak to me? You might have told Heaven that I needed one last word from you. Don't you know that God is good, that I would give my life for you? Qué sandunga vana, Mamá, por Dios!"

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[1] René d'Harnoncourt, "The Fiesta as a Work of Art," *Renascent Mexico* (Herring and Weinstock, editors) pp. 229 f.

[2] Erna Fergusson, *Fiesta in Mexico*, p. 99.

[3] Frances Toor, "Mexican Folk Dances," *Renascent Mexico* (Herring and Weinstock, editors), p. 196.

Being a poet, Máximo's cries and groans flowed from him in a rhythm which inevitably grew into a poem of grief and was set to music: slow, languorous, intense, and so deep in feeling that it at once became the anthem of the isthmus and will move to tears any Tehuano who hears it away from home. It has many verses, apparently many versions, but the wailing refrain never varies: "Ay, Sandunga! Qué sandunga vana, Mamá, por Dios!"[4]

Any number of couples may dance the Sandunga at once; the men and women face each other in rows. The women do a slow, swaying waltz step with a slight lift of their ruffled skirts, while the men dance before and around them in a rapid manner. They dance at least three feet apart and seem wholly indifferent to each other. There are five movements to the dance and the rhythm changes for each movement.

The men are attractive enough in their white suits and pointed felt hats but the women are breathtaking. The Tehuanas wear their everyday dress, which is most extraordinary and lovely. The skirts are long and full with a deep white flounce at the bottom which sweeps the ground and covers their bare feet. The blouse is a *huipil,* square-necked, short-sleeved and embroidered around the neck, sleeves and bottom. Bright ribbons adorn their hair which is worn in braids and wound around the head. They are unusually fond of gold jewelry and adorn themselves with fantastic gold earrings and heavy gold chains strung with American gold pieces. On special occasions they wear their *huipiles grandes*—those beautiful Tehuana headdresses which Fergusson says seem so inexplicable as an Indian garment. This is her explanation of its origin:

"There is a tradition that once a supply of lace baby dresses was washed ashore from a wreck: straight little frocks with pleated ruffles around the low-cut neck, around the bottom, and on the short sleeves in a fashion not unusual in the fifties or sixties. The Tehuanas, so they say, liked the dresses, but did not understand their use. The necks, cut for little girls, would not slip over a grown woman's head, but stuck, beautifully, under the hair, in front of the ears, making a saintly white aura for a lovely face. This is still the style for going to mass, with the ruffled skirt hiding the arms, and the little sleeves dangling useless front and back. Other times they lay the dress on the head with the ruffle turned back and flowing down the back in a panoply of grandeur."[5]

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[4] Fergusson, *op. cit.,* pp. 146 f.
[5] *Ibid.,* p. 149.

C. LA DANZA DE LOS TIGRES

The Dance of the Tigers as found in the state of Guerrero is amusing and vivacious. It is not religious in character; on the contrary, it is frankly profane. However, it has certain aspects of a liturgical dance—for the dancers have come from far and near to take part in the fulfilment of a *manda,* or promise to a saint, and it is only at religious festivals that the execution of the dance takes place. Toor is the authority for the following account:

First the dancers pay their respects to the saint for whom the feast is given. They enter the church and approach the altar with a sort of jig-step, making a series of genuflections as they proceed. After placing candles on the altar they dance back to the end of the line. Then they don their masks preparatory to beginning the dance outside.

The theme of the dance is the capture of a troublesome tiger in order to please the master of the estate. Many characters take part—the master, the mayordomo, an old man who owns dogs, one who owns ropes to catch the tiger, five vassals, two dogs, two deer, four buzzards, a tiger, and a man dressed as an old woman to make the people laugh. They wear costumes and head-pieces made to represent their various roles.

The dance begins with a series of figures composed of swift steps set to lively tunes. During these preliminary dances, the tiger tickles peoples' faces with his detached tail and makes himself unwelcome. Soon there begins the hunt for the tiger in which all the characters take part, until he is finally captured. His skin is to be used for riding breeches for the master. Then follows a dance of leave-taking. Before they return to their village, the dancers enter the church and take leave of the saint in much the same way as they greeted him.[6]

D. THE JARANA

The Jarana is the popular folk dance of Yucatán. The name, derived from that of a small stringed instrument, means literally noisy diversion. It is a village dance, used at weddings and other festivities. The men and women dance in couples, in facing rows. They dance only below the knee, holding the upper body quite rigid. The girl is not invited by her partner but by the mayordomo who sees that all the places are filled. The man

[6] Frances Toor, *Mexican Folkways,* VI (1939) pp. 88–90.

dances with one hand behind him, the girl holds her skirt; and as they pass each other they raise their arms in graceful curves and exchange glances. However, there is no hint of coquetry. Below is a description of the Jarana by the Mexican writer, Montes de Oca:

"The Jarana is danced with extraordinary ability. It has many shadings, with the characteristic feature of constant scraping of the floor with the shoes. There are moments when the music stops and the rhythm is kept up only by the light touch of the espadrilles against the floor. In the midst of the piece one hears the word 'Bomba!' This compels the man to address his partner with some words of flattery or of love."[7]

There is no special costume for the Jarana. Yucatecans are spotlessly clean and always wear white. The women all wear the same type of *huipil:* square-necked, sleeveless and sufficiently long to form the whole dress. They wear modern shoes now, though not long ago they were still using the Mongolian type of shoe with upturned tip. The hair is rolled high in a shining swirl across the top of the head and adorned with colored ribbons. Their jewelry consists of gold filigree rosaries and earrings. The white linen blouses, spotless trousers, and wide-brimmed Panamá hats of the men make the Jarana a beautiful spectacle.

[7] Gustavo Durán, *Recordings of Latin American Songs and Dances,* Music Series 3, Pan-American Union (January, 1942), p. 44, citing Montes de Oca.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

It is earnestly hoped that this paper has afforded not only an understanding of Mexican dances in their intimate relation to the historical development of the mores and ways of living in Mexico, but has fostered a sympathetic attitude towards the Mexican people as well. To understand Mexican dances is to understand Mexico; and understanding is the necessary basis for the neighborliness and friendship which we so earnestly desire. The writer believes this to such an extent that she is leaving immediately for Tehuántepec. And so—¡Adiós, amigos!

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